DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 457 CS 217 703

AUTHOR Coia, Lesley; Taylor, Monica
TITLE Future Perfect: Reflecting through Personal Narrative.
PUB DATE 2001-07-00
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the United Kingdom Reading Association (37th, Canterbury, England, July 6-8, 2001).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Autobiographies; Data Collection; Educational Research; Higher Education; Preservice Teacher Education; *Preservice Teachers; *Professional Development; Thematic Approach
IDENTIFIERS *Reflection Process; *Teaching Perspectives; Voice (Rhetoric)

ABSTRACT

Teaching is a reflective and deeply human activity, an ethical enterprise that involves the teacher as a person. The educational significance of autobiography lies in its ability to enable people to understand their present experiences and those yet to occur. Teacher-educators' interest in autobiography is very narrowly defined: the professional development of those who are entering teaching as a profession. The 23 undergraduate pre-service teachers who wrote personal narratives and final reflections for this study attend a small liberal arts college in the New York City area. During the first half of their middle level methods course, students were asked to read a variety of texts including action research and teaching narratives and write their own personal narratives revolving around the themes of identity, adolescence, literacy, curriculum, teaching and assessment, and diversity and multiculturalism. Data collection (field notes from classroom observation, discussions with students, and researcher dialogue) and analysis for this study occurred simultaneously; the students' reflections on the use and purpose of personal narratives are couched in terms of the overarching themes or categories that emerged from the data. Through writing personal narratives, the pre-service students discovered the intrinsic role that reflection plays in the daily experience of a teacher. The study revealed that the students emphasized the communal aspect of writing autobiographically. Finding a voice in relation to others is one of the most profound implications of the study. (Contains 12 references. Appended are the personal narratives assignment and final reflection guidelines.) (NKA)

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Future Perfect: Reflecting Through Personal Narrative

by

Lesley Coia and Monica Taylor

Paper presented at the United Kingdom Reading Association's International Conference
(37th, July 6-8, 2001)

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FUTURE PERFECT: REFLECTING THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Lesley Coia and Monica Taylor

INTRODUCTION

> You can never turn back the hands of time, for time only marches forward. However you can look back and learn –about your life, your family and friends, and most importantly about yourself. When you put it down on paper, it stimulates you to think about how you have evolved into who you are today and what you want from tomorrow. (Marianne)

Preparing students to be effective educators is not a matter of equipping them with techniques: teacher education is a foundation on which students can build reflective practice. As teacher educators we are not imparting skills, but rather helping students understand what it means to be a teacher (Britzman, 1986). To be an effective educator is not to reproduce one's own educational experience, no matter how successful that experience has been, nor is it to merely reproduce successful pedagogical techniques acquired during a teacher education program. Imagine, for a moment, that our expositions of preferred models of teaching and learning were so compelling that our students were instantly and permanently converted to expert practice. This image is not only unappealing but also distasteful because it bypasses the heart of teacher education: the teacher. Teaching is a reflective and deeply human activity. It is an ethical enterprise that involves the teacher as a person.

What does it mean to take our students, future teachers, seriously as people in this sense? People are "story telling animals" (MacIntyre, 1981). A central way of making

sense of our experience is through the stories we tell of ourselves and of others. The importance of telling our stories of who we are is widely recognized with the practice of personal writing having achieved considerable acceptance, not only in teacher education but also in all areas of education. The purpose of this study is to discuss the unique and particular function that autobiography serves for undergraduate pre-service teachers through an examination of our students' personal narratives and their final reflections.

Fisher, Fox, and Paille (1996) write that narrative "is especially useful in dealing with situations that encompass differing motivations, causality, conflict, and it allows one to connect and interpret events. Story is central to the organization of knowledge and to the processes of comprehension and thinking" (p. 434). We will demonstrate that the primary purpose of personal narrative is to provide another means by which our students can become more effective educators who engage in self-reflection, exploring the meaning of their own experiences in their daily school interactions as well as in their future lives as teachers.

In our research, autobiographical reflection is first and foremost undertaken with the intention of making sense of one's own life, or making meaning. Autobiographies, ostensibly about the past, are in fact about the present and most importantly about the future (Abbs, 1974). The educational significance of autobiography, however, lies in its ability to enable us to understand our present experiences and those yet to occur. Stories about the past are also about the future. It is this insight that motivates us, as teacher educators, in the use of autobiographical writing in teacher education: we are interested in educating students who will be teachers. Thus, our interest in autobiography is very narrowly defined: the professional development of those who are entering teaching as a

profession. Importantly our use of autobiography is based on a number of assumptions, crucial amongst which is that writing about one's self is educative. Our aim is to facilitate the movement from thinking as a student, to thinking and reflecting as a teacher. Pagano (1991) asserts that writing personal narratives encourages "students to bring curriculum theory to their lives and to theorize their lives in schools." She continues, "Autobiography promise[s] to be a passage between theory and practice and to make it possible for students to develop the habit of critical self reflection." (p. 193).

METHOD

The Narrators

The undergraduate pre-service teachers who wrote personal narratives and reflections for this study attend a small liberal arts North American college in the New York City area. This particular class was composed of five male and twenty-two female students between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two. The class was made up of twenty-three white students, three African American students, and one Latina student. The students ranged in background from middle class to working class. During the spring semester, 2001, when they wrote the autobiographical pieces for their middle level methods block, these students had completed most of their undergraduate coursework and were just a semester ahead of their student teaching experience. It is important to note that throughout this research study the names used for the participants are pseudonyms.

The Assignment

For this research study, during the first half of the course, each week the pre-service students were asked to read a variety of texts including action research and teaching narratives and write their own personal narratives revolving around the themes

of identity, adolescence, literacy, curriculum, teaching, and assessment, and diversity and multiculturalism. A major assumption made in this study was that students' own writing is already situated in a cultural context and this needs to be explicitly acknowledged. We achieved this by teaching about autobiography before, during and after the students have completed their own autobiographical work. In the syllabus (see Appendix A), the students were "invited to complete five short, exploratory narratives concerning [their] personal experiences and ideas about middle school issues" (p.2). The students received the following quote from Witherell and Noddings (1991) as a rationale for the assignment:

> Stories and narratives, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known . . . The narrator too has a story, one that is embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history. This embeddedness lies at the core of the teaching-learning experience. (pp. 1-3)

The students were instructed to write personal narratives that addressed these themes using the accompanying questions as a guide (see Appendix A). The questions were provided not to dominate the direction of their autobiographical writings but rather to help students to get started. Each week students discussed the readings and once a week they read aloud and reflected on their own personal narratives in small groups. This assignment was designed to encourage students to see connections between their readings

and the narratives that they composed about their own teaching beliefs and experiences. At the end of the semester, the students assembled a final portfolio that included detailed, concluding reflections that examined the process of writing these autobiographical pieces in response to a list of prompts (see Appendix B).

Collection and Analysis of Personal Narrative Reflections

The data for this study, drawn qualitatively from the middle level methods class, encompassed a collection of our students' written personal narratives, final reflections on the process of writing autobiographically and the place of personal narratives in teacher education, and our own written field notes from classroom observations, discussions with students, and our own dialogues. Because of the focus of this particular paper, our students' final reflections took precedence over other data. This research provides, as Merriam (1988) writes, "a rich, 'thick' description" (p. 11) of the ways in which pre-service teachers reflect on their writing of personal narratives. The data collection and analysis for this study occurred simultaneously. We examined data as they were collected and then arranged the data into "manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what's important and what is to be learned" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 153). As the research progressed, the data were analyzed inductively by means of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and categories were derived from the data. In other words, as the data were examined, we looked for regularities and patterns of words, phrases, behaviors, images, and participants' perspectives. Our students' reflections on the use and purpose of personal narratives are discussed in terms of the overarching themes or categories that emerged from the data.

REFLECTIONS ON PERSONAL NARRATIVE: DEVELOPING TEACHING SELVES

Reflection: Thinking Like a Teacher

> I think in order to be an effective teacher, you must look deep inside yourself and know who you truly are. (Maria)

Through writing personal narratives, our pre-service students discovered the intrinsic role that reflection plays in the daily experience of a teacher. Claire connected the process of writing personal narratives with being a reflective practitioner:

> I have learned that personal narrative is really what being an educator is, except lessons of course. We have used the personal narratives in an attempt to analyze the conclusions that we came up with individually. [Students can] reflect back on their own lives and how they have been affected from their own pasts. The narratives also allowed us to think like teachers, rather than just students trying to become teachers.

Writing personal narratives became a way to connect educational theory with classroom practice and experience. Anna explained: "Because I wrote these pieces, my experience at [the field school] was much more worthwhile. I was able to constructively reflect on my practicum experiences and rethink, expand, and enhance my beliefs from the beginning of the semester." She continued, "These narratives allowed me to see first hand my growth as a student and a future teacher. As I look back on my pieces, I can see how I have modified and enhanced my beliefs as a direct result of my experience." The autobiographical writing assignments encouraged students to think as reflective teachers do: continually examining, assessing and re-shaping their teaching beliefs and practices.

Although the writing of narratives was valued, several students felt that the process was both difficult and painful because of the personal and reflective nature of the assignment. "This was a writing assignment that I enjoyed but also had to struggle with to expose feeling and pain that only a few have known," wrote Susanna. Throughout Antoinette's reflection, she battled with the idea of whether or not she found the personal narrative assignment worthwhile because of its challenging nature: "I was not thrilled about having to write about myself and found it to be difficult. Despite the fact that I am unsure about recommending the assignment, I do feel that it will affect my future as a teacher. I feel that the narratives have helped me put things in perspective."

Clarity: Making Teaching Beliefs Concrete

The autobiographical writings, rather than teaching our students new information, guided them to unearth, clarify, and make concrete the beliefs and concepts that they already held about teaching. Claire insightfully asserted, "In writing these personal narratives, I did not really learn anything so much as I realized things about myself. Although I have not started teaching yet, I already have some pretty defined beliefs concerning the field. The narratives helped me gather my thoughts and express them in a clear manner." Angela also believed that writing helped her to discover her teaching beliefs: "Many times I felt that I had no view on a subject, for example curriculum, but after writing the narrative I clearly had a view. It might push a student to think about something that they would not normally think about." Danielle discussed the ways in which writing personal narratives was a process of bringing to the surface ideas and beliefs that she held but of which she was not necessarily aware. She explained, "There are so many ideas that jump around in the consciousness of one's mind. These narratives

forced me to examine many of my own personal philosophies and ideas. These were ideas I had always had but I have never been forced to center onto these philosophies enough to put them into concrete words."

Besides clarification, students saw the use of personal narratives as a means to both pose and answer questions. "Many questions were answered as well as many raised," remarked Kathy. Using the personal narratives as a way to sort through concerns, Dora wrote, "I am glad that I was able to write these narratives because it let out any fears, frustrations, or questions that I have had inside me about school, children, and myself." By asking our students to write personal narratives on various educational themes, we encouraged them to delve deeply and discover the educational beliefs that will serve as the foundation of their teaching practice. Gabriella concluded, "It was the reflections that I have written which helped me to realize who I am and what I believe to be my teaching styles and strategies."

Past, Present, and Future

> Reflection is good for the mind and the soul. It is a time to rethink one's priorities, joys and satisfactions, as well as dissatisfactions. It is an opportunity to create balance in one's existence by looking back on the past, getting in touch with the present, and assessing one's expectations of the future. (Marianne)

Writing autobiographical texts provided a fluid method for pre-service teachers to connect their past, present, and future selves with the hopes of nurturing and strengthening their teaching voices and perspectives. Jackie valued the journey to her past and the connections that she was able to interweave between her past life and her future teaching aspirations. She wrote, "Writing gave me time to reflect and think about

my past. Writing these pieces allowed me to travel back in time and refresh some childhood memories that were starting to fade. As I remembered some key moments in my life, I realized how each one of them affects me as a person today."

Reflecting about one's own past experiences in school reminded some pre-service teachers of what it was like to be a student and therefore led them to feel that they could be more sensitive to their potential students. Susanna wrote, "The things that I was forced to remember or to relate to will help me to be more sensitive to my students." Marianne discussed how writing personal narratives helped her to better relate to students during her field experience. She described the writing as an "opportunity to stroll, both willingly and unwillingly, down memory lane and get in touch with [her] adolescent self, to better understand the thoughts, emotions, and priorities that dominate this rough age of transformation from the child you are to the adult you long to be." She concluded, "This in turn helped me relate on a closer level to the students that I met in the field." Personal narrative required students to develop a future teaching perspective while looking back to the past and straight ahead in the present.

Sharing Stories Give Us a Voice

We required that our students share and discuss their narratives in small groups, reading them aloud, on specific dates known in advance. Initially, our pre-service teachers were apprehensive about sharing their narratives within the classroom community. They were fearful of sharing personal aspects about themselves, revealing too much, or simply feeling different or embarrassed. Danielle reflected, "At first I felt very nervous about sharing my think pieces, they were very personal to me." Gabriella agreed, "At first I was a little embarrassed to write a few things because I knew that my

peers and teacher would be reading and hearing the narratives." As they continued to share, however, many of our students found that an audience of their peers and professors supported and enhanced their writing. In a sense, they perceived that their autobiographical pieces would be less powerful and expressive if they were only written for themselves. Jennifer explained, "I became an author instead of a student writing for a teacher. I wanted to captivate my peers and make sure that they remembered it after hearing four other narratives. It made you look forward to hearing everyone else's and it made you feel guilty when you did not have it because you were missing out on a bonding experience." Denise appreciated a peer audience for her writing: "Sharing is fun because you are allowed to show others your work and be proud of the work that you do." Amy felt that by listening to others, she was more comfortable sharing her own perspectives: "From sharing the narratives I was able to see other classmates' points of view which allowed me to feel more comfortable sharing my own."

Moreover, the social dynamic of narratives encouraged students to identify similarities and differences in their experiences and perspectives. They recognized and celebrated the concept that as Kristy put it "I was not the only one." Angela wrote, "It helped when we shared the narratives because I was able to see that others felt the same way that I had." More than learning about differences, our students appreciated and embraced the similarities that they could find across gender, race, class, sexual orientation and interests. "By sharing my narratives with the class I realized that everyone no matter what race or gender you are, has had events take place in their lives that impacted their identity," Fiona stated poignantly, "Those events make us who we are, and are the reason why we believe what we believe today." Jack valued both the

similarities and differences that arose in sharing the autobiographical pieces. He was able to connect the experience with his future teaching practices: "It also gave me a point of view. It finally gave me a chance to see how many similar experiences I had growing up, as well as seeing how different people really are. It is important to use both aspects when teaching in the classroom."

Building a Writing Community.

How did our classroom become a place where students felt comfortable and safe sharing their personal narratives? To a great extent, our students attributed their comfort level within the classroom community to the considerable sharing of personal writings that took place. Kristy described her perspective:

> When we attended class after writing our narratives, I really looked forward to hearing everyone's personal stories. By sharing the narratives, I was able to get to know people I didn't really know well. They also gave me ideas, and gave me confidence that I was not alone on certain topics. Since we are united as a class, I think that it is important to hear about where everyone is coming from and where they are planning to go in the future.

Many of our pre-service teachers felt that they developed strong connections with their classmates through the process of sharing their personal stories. Antoinette, who struggled with the social aspect of writing, admitted, "Sharing the narratives got us to become closer together. I also think that the narratives helped us to gain respect for one another. We were able to see where everyone was coming from. They also enabled us to feel what the other students were going through."

Eileen described how the exchange of the narratives raised students' confidence about certain teaching ideals and practices and indicated other shortcomings that could be developed. "We all learned from one another too, and it made us realize our strengths and weaknesses that we need to overcome," she discussed, "Some people shared information that I found inspiring, and others told me personally that my work touched them. This helped heighten self-esteem but also notice our weaknesses at the same time." The sharing of one's own writing and the listening to the writings of others served reciprocal purposes; to express one's perspective and receive feedback as well as to be inspired and to realize that, as Kristy wrote and many students commented in discussions, one is not alone in her feelings, responses and experiences. The tension between the personal and the social evinced by these students reflects one of our initial concerns. We were unclear about the efficacy or even propriety of students sharing their autobiographies. The students, however, clearly saw this aspect of the exercise as one of the most valuable.

Are Personal Narratives Social Texts?

Although many of our students saw a direct correlation between the sharing of their personal narratives and the level of comfort and inspiration that developed as a result of this sharing, some students quite honestly reflected that writing personal narrative should be for the individual only and should have no audience but the author herself. Claire considered:

> If no one was going to read the personal narrative I think that mine would have been much better in that I would not have had to think about what I was writing so much, to pay attention to revealing too much, to bother with the question of whether or not I

was relaying my opinions clearly to the reader, and I would not have had to worry about misinterpretations.

Antoinette revealed, "I feel that sharing the narratives made some people leave some things out. Therefore they were not showing everything about them only a part that they wanted everyone to know." Perhaps the truth is that everyone shares only the parts of their personal stories that they want others to know, catering to a specific audience no matter what the assignment is. Marianne's statement gave ultimate authority to the author when she wrote: "Whether or not [the narratives] would be openly shared would be left to the discretion of the author. The primary focus should be what the writer learns about himself without worrying about being judged by his peers." Addressing our students' concerns, we continue to search for the best possible ways to use personal narrative in the social setting of a teacher education course without silencing or altering individual students' voices.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The problem of how to characterize the relation between the personal and the social is endemic to the autobiographical enterprise. Marcus (1994), for example, shows how the personal and concern with narcissism have been issues to autobiographers and their critics since at least the eighteenth century. Apple (1997) expresses the danger that autobiography can focus too much on the self. After noting that he finds such forms "compelling and insightful," as well as powerful, he expresses his worry that "just as often such writing runs the risk of lapsing into possessive individualism . . . such writing can serve the chilling function of basically saying, 'But enough about you, let me tell you about me'" (p.127). He reminds us of the importance of being ever mindful of the social

and political context within which the students are writing, and whose perspectives are being privileged.

We chose an autobiographical method with our students as a means of helping them make the transition to thinking like teachers: to find and develop their voices as reflective practitioners, yet we were very aware that concern to acknowledge our students' voices should not obscure the fundamental point that some voices are privileged. Traditionally, the induction of students into the teaching profession has not paid attention to what we have argued here: the centrality of developing one's own professional voice in the context of reflecting on the meaning of experience. A primary concern for us in working with students who wish to be teachers is the importance of helping them develop a sense of their own efficacy; of a sense of agency in the social context of schooling. The problem of agency is critical in education. A sense of personal efficacy can be encouraged through the emphasis on autobiography as a social endeavor.

In our study, we discovered that our students emphasized this communal aspect of writing autobiographically. We acknowledged that autobiographical writing, as Buchanan and Middleton (1994) show in relation to their work on reminiscence with older people, is a profoundly social enterprise, concerned with the rights to have a voice in relations with others. Finding a voice in relation to others is one of the most profound implications of our study. Thus, while we recognize that there are problems with the view that the autobiography can expose and undercut exclusive categories and marginalization, in the particular context in which we are using autobiography, we believe that the approach is warranted. The understanding of autobiography as part of a movement to democratize education, parallels our concern that personal narrative in

teacher education should be used not so much to provide an opportunity to talk about one's self, but rather to examine the struggles over giving and withholding the right to a voice. At least in teacher education, the concern with the use of autobiography is not so much with individual psychological processes. To focus on the individual psychological benefits, to confuse autobiography with therapy, would be to rob autobiography of its social benefits. While this perspective frees us from some of the supposed challenges of using autobiography in the classroom, such as the specter of assessing someone on the way she tells her life, or even perhaps more troubling, on the life she has lived, it does, nonetheless raise issues of its own.

These concerns with voice reveal some of our own assumptions about the intrinsic privacy of autobiographies, which bring us to a further implication of our study. If our educational aims are to be achieved, then we have not only to be clear about the nature of autobiography but we have to comprehend the influence of our own common sense understanding of autobiography and how that may or may not further our stated aims. Along with our students, we are over-familiar with the autobiographical form. No longer is it the case that autobiographies are written by the select few. One has only to pick up a newspaper, switch on the television or look at the new titles displayed in bookshops to see that autobiographical sketches and exposés are a familiar part of contemporary culture. Our lives are saturated with the stories of others. Unless the implicit norms expressed in this familiarity with the autobiographical form are explicitly addressed, students and professors will reproduce their own cultural understandings of the genre. We must, in short, be reflective about the tools we use to help our students be reflective.

As we have worked through these issues we have been constantly reminded of Britzman's (1989) comment that "teacher education, like any education, is an ideological education" (p. 444). Using an autobiographical method is not neutral with respect to views on epistemology, political and social structures, or the status of the individual. Autobiography is a cultural artifact with a particular history that is used to achieve particular ends. While our own over-familiarity with the autobiographical form does not extend to how autobiography functions as a cultural artifact, if it is to perform an educative function, it is vital for our students to recognize that as a literary form it comes to us loaded down with cultural, historical and philosophical baggage.

While it seems that the use of an autobiographical method in teacher education comes the closest of all our educational endeavors to addressing the Socratic dictum "Know thyself," it is fraught with dangers and difficulties. As our students noted, it is a challenging task, perhaps anticipating Apple's (1997) question: "Why should we assume that the personal is any less difficult to understand than the 'external' world?" (p. 127). Encouraging our students to engage in autobiographical writing involves activating deep philosophical assumptions about the nature of the self and how it can be known, as well as the epistemological relevance of personal experience in knowing about the world. We discovered that if the use of an autobiographical method is to have positive outcomes then it is vital that the students continually reflect on these questions by being encouraged to consider the meaning of autobiography itself. It would seem that situating students' own autobiographical work in the context of other autobiographical work is necessary not only to provide students with stimulus material, as we initially intended, but also to furnish additional material for ongoing reflective discussions on what it means to write

autobiographically. Thus, while students ran the gamut of views on autobiography, it was interesting that there was, relatively little problematizing of the self, with students seeming to prefer to work more on identification issues and providing coherence as a way of understanding their experience. These preferences raise questions that need to be addressed elsewhere. For now it is important to reflect on what we have learned and so it is appropriate to end as we began, with the words of one of our students:

> I have learned a lot from writing these narratives. I have been able to review my life and really think about my experiences. They have helped me realize what kind of teacher that I would like to be and what teaching values I hope to keep with me throughout my career. (Angela)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

PERSONAL NARRATIVES ASSIGNMENT FROM SYLLABUS

1) **Completion of several personal narratives or short focused writings.** You are invited to complete five short, exploratory narratives concerning your personal experiences and ideas about middle school issues. The rationale for this activity comes from Witherell and Noddings, who write,

> Stories and narratives, whether personal or fictional, provide meaning and belonging in our lives. They attach us to others and to our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character, even advice on what we might do with our lives. The story fabric offers us images, myths, and metaphors that are morally resonant and contribute both to our knowing and our being known. . . The narrator too has a story, one that is embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history. This embeddedness lies at the core of the teaching-learning experience. (Witherell & Noddings, *Stories Lives Tell,* 1991).

As we write and share our individual stories and beliefs, we allow our voices to intermingle with the voices represented in the readings and elsewhere. Broad topics for these short pieces are listed below. Also included are accompanying questions or prompts which may provide you with a focus or may serve as points of departure. These questions should serve to help you begin writing. They should not restrict your thoughts in any way. (The concept of writing think pieces was adapted from a course designed by Fox and Anders, 1994).

a. **Identity.** In this piece, focus on any number of issues related to identity: experience, self, and voice. What stands out for you over the past few years? What kinds of things have been important to you? What stays with you? What is your life like right now? What do you care about, think about? How would you describe yourself to yourself now? If you were to tell yourself who you really are, how would you do that? How do you see yourself changing in the future? What components make up who you are now? **Due Friday, January 26th.**
b. **Adolescence.** In this piece, focus on your identity as an adolescence. What were you like as an adolescent? What things or characteristics were important to you then? How did you express yourself as an adolescent? What or who

influenced your identity as an adolescent? How is the way you see yourself now different from the way you saw yourself as an adolescent? What led to the changes? What components made up your adolescent identity? What were you reading, listening to, watching, wearing, etc.? What were your relationships like to friends, family, teachers, strangers, or others? **Due Thursday, February 1st.**

c. **Literacy.** In this piece, focus on your personal beliefs about literacy. What is literacy? How and when did you learn how to read and write? What significant memories do you have of these experiences? Were there specific individuals who affected and influenced your development, positively or negatively? What are your reading and writing memories of middle school? At home, or in your community? Have your feelings about reading or writing changed? Why or why not? What are your teaching beliefs about literacy? From your experiences, what are the most effective strategies to enhance literacy in the classroom? **Due Friday, February 9th.**

d. **Curriculum, Teaching, and Assessment.** Why did you choose to become a teacher? What particular level do you want to teach and why? What is your personal teaching philosophy? What is your definition of "teaching"? Of "learning"? Of "knowledge"? What would be your preferred approach to curriculum design? Why? What sort of teaching methods and assessment tools do you find personally appealing? How do you plan to be an inclusive teacher? How do you envision incorporating a variety of different content areas or subjects into the curriculum? **Due Friday, February 16th.**

e. **Diversity and Multiculturalism.** How do you define "culture"? What are some of the "signs" or "signifiers" of your culture? How do you define an education that is "multicultural"? How will the interplay among language, gender, power, find its way into your life, classroom, school, or the lives of your students? How might issues of gender, ethnicity, race, social class, culture, religion, sexual orientation, or ability become an integral part of your school curricula or instructional practices? What role might social justice and social change play in your school curricula? **Due Friday, February 23rd.**

f. **Final Reflection.** At the end of the semester, you will be asked to assemble a final reflection incorporating the various think pieces into a portfolio. The portfolio should include an introduction about the different pieces, a conclusion discussing any changes in beliefs after the class discussions, activities, and practicum, and a reflection examining the process of writing these think pieces (what were the benefits, disadvantages, changes you would make, etc.). **Due Friday, May 4th.**

APPENDIX B

FINAL REFLECTION GUIDELINES

1. **Respond to the following questions:**
   - What did you learn from writing these narratives?
   - What did you learn from sharing these narratives?
   - What did you learn about narratives?
   - Do you recommend using this assignment again? Can you suggest any changes?
   - Has your writing/reading been affected by the narrative assignment? If so, how?
   - Will the writing of narratives influence your future as a teacher? If so, how?
   - Did you find yourself, when writing the narratives, shaping events to fit the story? Did you think that this was positive or negative?
   - Was the fact that I read these narratives an influence on the way that they were written?
   - How would your narratives have been different if no one read them?
   - Is it important for your narratives to have a real beginning, middle, and end?
   - Do you feel that your anecdotes or stories were truthful?
   - Do you think that your narratives would be the same if you wrote them in ten years? Why or why not? Explain.